

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE
DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES
RS 437; *The Writings of Paul*
FALL 2014 T 16:00-18:45

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Paul of Tarsus, one of the world's most influential persons by virtue of his letters, has become one of the most controversial figures of modern scholarship. Modern scholars from several different disciplines have raised a host of crucial questions surrounding him. For example, was Paul of Tarsus the 'true' founder of Christianity? Did Paul's teachings agree with Jesus of Nazareth or did Paul invent a different, 'new' religion now called Christianity? Was Paul a misogynist? Or, did women hold positions of leadership in house-churches established by Paul? Why did Rome execute Paul? Was he a Roman citizen? Did Paul advocate an anti-imperial challenge to Roman colonization or did he require obedience to authorities? How much was Paul influenced by Greek culture? Did Paul reject Judaism as a *salvation by works* parochial religion not suited for his Hellenistic world? Did Paul really include 'Gentiles'? What did Paul teach about "homosexuality?" Has modern American Christianity misunderstood Paul and betrayed his message? Was Paul a scoundrel who bullied his congregants? What is the "New Perspective on Paul"? What was the 'Gospel of Jesus Christ,' according to Paul? And, **how did Paul use power** among his Christ communities; for his own empowerment or to empower others?

This course examines Paul's writings in the larger social and religious context of ancient Mediterranean culture and politics—that's right—politics. Attention is given to the diverse **religio-political**, philosophical, and economic make-up of Greco-Roman cities where Paul established Christ communities. Special consideration will be given to *kyriarchal* systems of power in the Ancient Mediterranean World (AMW). We will analyze how such pyramids of oppressive religio-political power shaped everyone in the AMW. We will attempt to resolve one of the most perplexing problems surrounding Paul of Tarsus in modern Pauline scholarship. How did Paul respond to the oppressive power structures of his day? ***Did he challenge traditional power in establishing his Christ communities or use it for his own purposes as an "Apostle of Jesus Christ"?***

Students will learn to apply a historical and contextual approach to the writings of Paul. Such a descriptive and critical methodology differs from traditional faith and devotional readings. *From a historical-critical perspective, Paul's letters were not written to us.* While giving serious attention to the *theological content* of Paul's texts, this course does not promote any particular Pauline or sectarian theological agenda. The religious aspects of these early texts are examined in light of modern historical-critical, anthropological

and sociological analysis—including rhetorical criticism often linked with post-colonial feminist and biblical studies. The intersection of such scholarly approaches now recognizes that the Ancient Mediterranean World did not separate religion and politics—hence religio-political or *kyriarchy*. This in no way diminishes the religious and theological dimensions of the texts under consideration. By placing Paul and his texts in their socio-historical context, we begin to eliminate later doctrines and anachronistic cultural values that distort both Paul’s original social concerns and theological themes. Thus, this course sensitizes students to various methodological issues and heuristic models in current Pauline scholarship.

Paul’s writings continue to shape Christians’ attitudes towards women, gays, Jews, other religions, and current social issues. Therefore, it is important to analyze and deconstruct the political and psychological repercussions Paul and his interpreters continue to have on our modern culture.

Course Requirements:

1. The assigned readings must be done in advance of class discussion/lecture. An absence without a written excuse results in the loss of 2 percentage points from the student’s final grade. For example, five unexcused absences will lower one’s final grade by one letter grade. **(20% attendance and participation. This includes written “IDs” or short essays deconstructing passages from Paul’s letters which will be assigned randomly in class due at the beginning of the following class meeting).**
2. Students take **one** scheduled essay exam (a midterm), worth **40%** of the total grade. The format of the exam will be discussed in class. Students will be given a comprehensive study guide approximately one week prior to the exam.
3. Students will deliver an oral presentation on a topic involving Pauline studies or a section from one of Paul’s seven undisputed texts during the semester. Students will turn in an outline at the time of their scheduled oral presentation that includes the following:
 - a. The student’s paper topic.
 - b. A thesis statement and proposal that says how the student intends to address his or her topic (short paragraph).
 - c. An outline of the proposed body of the paper.
 - d. A bibliography using at least 4 outside scholarly sources.

This presentation will introduce the topic to be submitted as a written paper (double spaced, 8-10 pages), due the day of the final. This assignment is worth the remaining **40%** of the total grade; **5%** for oral presentation and **35%** for the research paper. Professor Talbott will provide a list of presentation/paper topics. Students must begin to schedule their oral presentation the beginning of the 9th week of the semester and presentations will begin on the tenth week. No oral presentations will be given on the days of examinations. Paper must be 12-point font with 1 inch margins. Citations from authors must be carefully referenced by in-line, footnote, or endnote style with a complete bibliography, again, at least **four** outside scholarly sources. Please avoid non-scholarly internet sources; if you are not certain about the acceptability of a research source—simply ask Professor Talbott.

4. Students may find materials related to the course on Moodle.

5. **Any form of plagiarism will result in receiving NO CREDIT for the paper and possible disciplinary action from the University.**
6. The plus and minus grading system applies to all assignments as well as to the student's grade for the course.
7. Respect others in class. Lively discussions need not lapse into personal attacks or defamation of another's character or beliefs.
8. PLEASE turn off cell phones during class. **Laptops may be used for taking notes ONLY.**
9. Students who leave prior to the end of class will not get credit for attending that class meeting.

RS 437 Student Learning Outcomes:

1. Become proficient at reconstructing the original historical setting of Paul's undisputed texts based on social-scientific data from the ancient Mediterranean world.
2. Interpret Pauline texts based on critical analysis, *not* theological assumptions.
3. Learn basic strategies and theoretical models employed in modern scholarship, including feminist hermeneutics, social-scientific criticism, and post-colonial criticism.
4. Compare Paul with Second Temple Judaism, Jesus of Nazareth, Philo, Stoicism, Cynicism, and other religions and philosophical systems in the ancient Mediterranean world.
5. Synthesize the above objectives in written essays on the two scheduled exams and a cogent research paper.

Course Texts:

1. Bruce J. Malina and John J. Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the letters of Paul*. (Fortress Press: 2006).
2. Rick Talbott, *Jesus, Paul, and Power: Rhetoric, ritual, and Metaphor in Ancient Mediterranean Christianity*. (Cascade Books: 2010).
3. An English translation of the New Testament. Note: students may use a translation in another language to accompany their modern English translations.

Assignments and Exams:

Week 1	Talbott, Forward and Preface.
Week 2	Malina-Pilch Introduction
Week 3	Talbott: Chapter 1.
Week 4	Talbott: Chapter 2; Malina pp. 27-56; New Testament, I Thessalonians.
Week 5	Talbott: Chapter 3; Malina pp. 57-132; I Corinthians.
Week 6	Talbott: Chapter 4; Review for exam.
Week 7	First Exam. Malina pp. 133-176; II Corinthians.
Week 8	Talbott: Chapter 5:
Week 9	Talbott Conclusion: Malina pp. 177-218; Galatians. (Begin to schedule oral presentations with Professor Talbott).

- Week 10: Malina: pp. 219-238: Romans Chapters 1-8. (Begin in-class oral paper presentations).
- Week 11 Malina: pp. 239-294: Romans 8-16.
- Week 12 Malina: pp. 295-320; Phillippians.
- Week 13 Malina: pp. 321-330; Philemon.
- Week 14 Pauline Traditions Colossians and Ephesians.
- Week 15 Last of oral presentations.
- Finals Week** Turn in Paper: